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Sahita's Performance, Satire of the Life of Javanese Women

Yustina Devi Ardhiani

The Religious and Cultural Studies Program, Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Email: devilitto@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Sahita is a performance art group established in Surakarta-Central Java with four members of Javanese women who are in their forties to fifties. On stage performance, Sahita acts upon old women who are not pretty, but plump, attractive, energetic, and humorous. Their performance is considered "uncommon" considering the fact that Sahita's cultural background is Javanese which is dominated by youth, beauty, proportional body as the beauty of female bodily form, and gentle manner as women described on stage performance. The research questions highlights why Sahita prefers to have satire style and chooses traditional art as the basis in producing new works? The data are gained through field observation, deep interview and library study. The finding reveals that Sahita prefers the satire style to express what is hard to talk in the daily life and to express critics in humorous ways so that the criticized party can also enjoy the performance. In their works, Sahita makes traditional art as its base because of its strong background in traditional art and because of its unlimited exploration. What makes Sahita unique besides its members who are all women voicing women's anxiety, Sahita also presents traditional art with contemporary taste in their works.

Keywords: *women artists, Javanese culture, traditional art, contemporary art, satire*

INTRODUCTION

"Performance art stage is my life. I am fully aware that when I grow older, all of this will end, I will no longer be able to celebrate my dancing," said a *ronggeng Jaipong* dancer from Kerawang-West Java, Indonesia. Similar anxiety plagues women artists especially dancers (Surur dan Anoeграjekti, 2004: 6-7). The statement portrays the perception of a *ronggeng* dancer that aging means the end of career as dancer. Is it true?

Discussing Javanese women in performance art stage is discussing the issue of marginalization of Javanese women. Religion, culture, and structure of Javanese society reinforce each other to limit the space for women and as consequence makes it difficult (although not impossible) to unravel and overcome. The issue of women in performance art is inseparable from the context in art which position women as passive object of art instead of subject of art capable of creation on her own will. The preconceived notion is that performance art requires young, beautiful, and sensual women as prima donna. There is also a notion that what people are looking for from female dancers is their sensual appeal sensually appealing. In addition, most female dancers accept the view that youth is an important factor for the success and sustainability of their career (Surur and Anoeграjekti, 2004: 25).